MODERN CONSERVATISM: OUR QUALITY OF LIFE AGENDA

THE CONSERVATIVE QUALITY OF LIFE MANIFESTO 2010

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER
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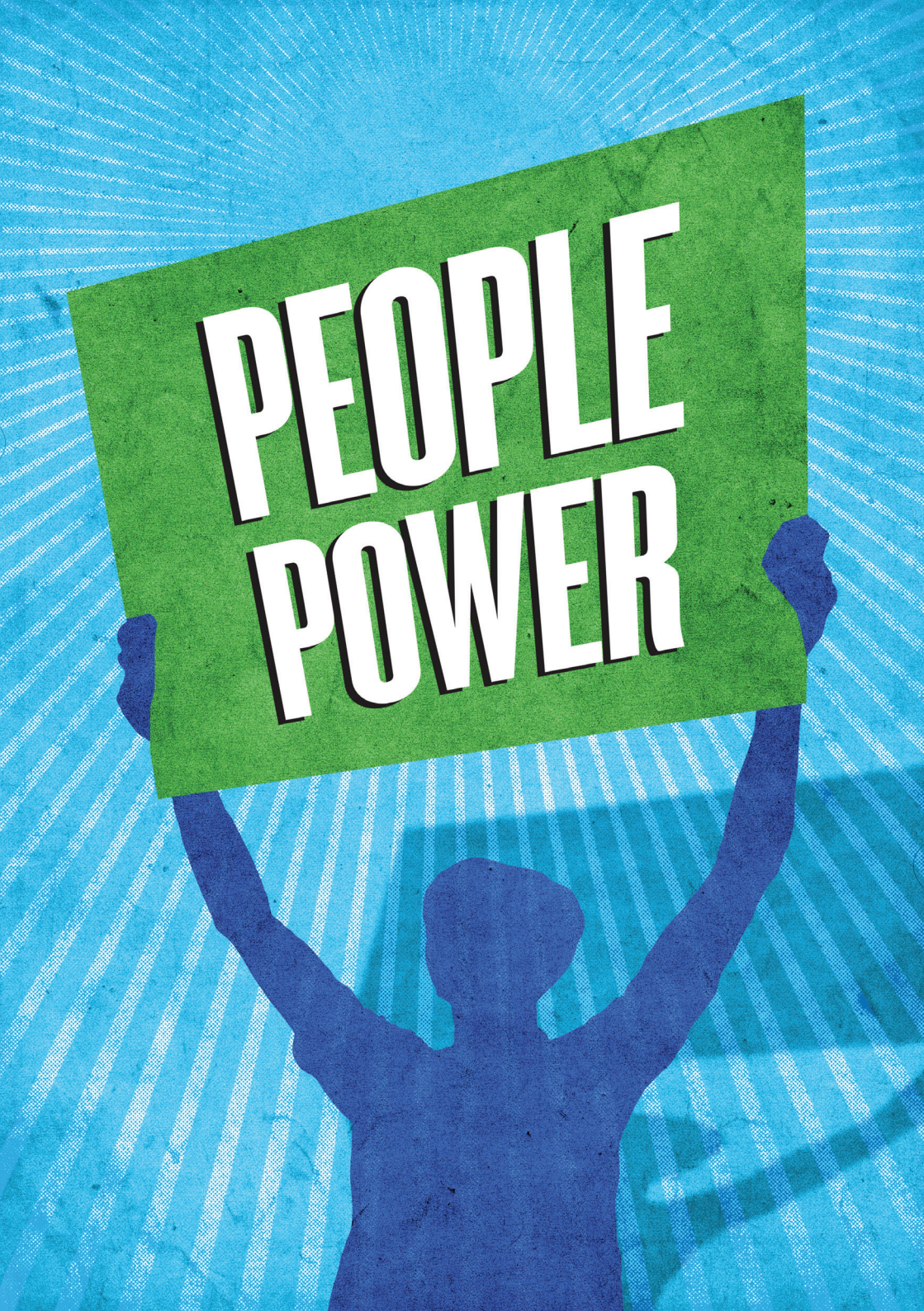
PEOPLE
POWER

How can we achieve real change in this country? How can we take Britain in a completely new direction? These are the central questions running through this election. And there is only one answer to them: a new, strong Conservative government. Only with a new Conservative government can we make a clean break from the past and the failed policies of the past.

Take the environment. We've had thirteen wasted years of tough talk but pitiful action from Labour. In contrast we've made the environment a priority, fighting for a Climate Change Bill and opposing the third runway at Heathrow. In government we'd go further – starting a new Green Investment Bank, paying people to generate their own energy and offering £6,500 of energy efficiency improvements to every home in the country, at no up-front cost. And in this document we set out a new plan to invite communities to plant a tree for every child born in England each year. Taken together, it's an ambitious programme to tackle climate change and improve our quality of life – but these things can only come about with the clean break of a new Conservative government.

The same story is true of the fight for our civil liberties. Labour have shown complete contempt for the rights of the individual. In opposition we have fought them every step of the way; forcing them into a humiliating u-turn over 42-day detention. In government we'll go further, scrapping the Contactpoint database and abolishing ID cards. But these blows for our civil liberties will only happen with the clean break of a new Conservative government.

And what about giving people more power over their lives? Under Labour we've become one of the most centralised countries in the developed world. We've done what we can to fight this in opposition - the Sustainable Communities Act, a Conservative Private Members' Bill, is a good example. But if we win that election next week we will go much, much further with a radical redistribution of power. More power to allow organisations to set up new schools. More power to people to elect their police commissioner. More power to neighbourhoods to plan and shape the place they live in. And in this document we set out a new plan that will give neighbourhoods the power to create new parks and playgrounds, with access to money from local developments and more control over the planning system. But again, all this can only become a reality with the clean break of a new Conservative government.

The plans in this document will appeal to anyone who wants real change and a real change in direction. The choice before you is clear: if you care about the environment, if you care about civil liberties, if you care about people power, if you want a clean break from the past, if you want to build the Big Society – then vote Conservative.

1. A better quality of life

We all want a better quality of life – be it to feel healthier, more secure or better off – and we know it is not something we can expect government to provide on its own; it cannot be manufactured for people by the state. But government can create the right conditions to help people achieve the best for themselves and their communities. That is the Big Society approach to improving people's quality of life.

Good health is the most basic element of people's well-being. We need a health system that genuinely works to promote well-being and prevent ill health, not just creaks at the seams trying to manage the rising burden of acute care.

We need strong families – the bedrock of the Big Society. Families are where a good, healthy start in life begins. There is far too little support for families today, which is why there is so much family breakdown, and the associated social problems this creates. We need better early years support, more support for commitment and marriage, and better support for parenting.

Communities must be safer. The rising tide of violence, the drink-fuelled disorder and all the antisocial behaviour scar too many neighbourhoods today. And we must tackle discrimination so that everybody can play their part in bringing about the more vibrant, dynamic, enterprising communities we all want to see.

Labour are failing to provide the basic conditions for people and communities to promote a better quality of life for each other, not because of any malign intent, but because their approach is wrong: all the state-led schemes, top-down control and bureaucratic diktat that goes against the grain of human nature and the way communities are organised today.

We want to create safer, stronger communities, in a modern Britain that is more liberal and more family-friendly. A Big Society where people are pulling together to help solve their problems together. And we will only realise this vision with the values and leadership offered today by the Conservative Party.

Make Britain the most family-friendly country in Europe

Support stronger families

We will recognise marriage and civil partnerships in the tax system: basic rate taxpayers will be able to transfer £750 of their

tax free personal allowance to their partner in order to reduce their partner's income tax bill. This will be worth up to £150 a year per couple. We will end the couple penalty in the tax credits system as we make savings from our welfare reform plans.

Families need the best possible advice and support while their children are young. We will provide 4,200 more Sure Start health visitors – giving all parents a guaranteed level of support before and after birth until their child starts school. This will be paid for out of the Department of Health budget and by refocusing Sure Start's peripatetic outreach services.

Making Britain more family-friendly means helping families spend more time together. That is why we will initially extend the right to request flexible working to every parent with a child under the age of eighteen. We want our government to lead from the front, so we will extend the right to request flexible working to all those in the public sector, recognising that this may need to be done in stages. In addition, we will:

- in the longer term, extend the right to request flexible working to all, but only in the light of experience and after full consultation with business on how to do this in a way which is administratively simple and without burdening them with extra costs; and,
- oblige JobCentre Plus offices to ask employers if their vacancies could be advertised on a part-time or flexible basis.

We will introduce a new system of flexible parental leave which lets parents share maternity leave between them, while ensuring that parents on leave can stay in touch with their employer. We support the provision of free nursery care for pre-school children, and we want that support to be provided by a diverse range of providers. A Conservative government will review the way the childcare industry is regulated and funded to ensure that no providers, including childminders, are put at a disadvantage.

To give families more control over their lives, we will put funding for relationship support on a stable, long-term footing and make sure couples are given greater encouragement to use existing relationship support. We will review family law in order to increase the use of mediation when couples do break up, and look at how best to provide greater access rights to non-resident parents and grandparents.

A more child-friendly culture

Too many parents have to worry about manipulative marketing to children which goes completely unchecked, while, at the same time, they see all the reports over schools ceasing to provide adventure trips and banning conkers due to fear of health and safety litigation. The government's priorities are all wrong, and are creating a society that undermines parents'

ability to give their children a healthy and balanced upbringing.

We will reverse the 'commercialisation' of childhood through a number of measures, including banning companies from using new peer-to-peer marketing techniques targeted at children, tackling marketing on corporate websites targeted at children, and establishing a new online system that gives parents greater powers to take action against irresponsible commercial activities.

We will encourage a sensible approach to risk and adventure by tackling the fear of litigation that stifles opportunities for adventurous activities. As long as there is parental consent and sensible precautions are taken, activity and adventure organisers should only be held liable for negligence if they show deliberate intent or reckless behaviour.

Improve health and well-being

Better local health care

The government's top-down approach to improving public health is failing. For example, the UK now has more obese people than any other OECD country except New Zealand, Mexico and the US,[1] and the difference between the life expectancy of the richest and poorest in our country was recently measured as the greatest since Victorian times.[2] We need a new, community-centred approach that puts health and prevention first.

Lifestyle-linked health problems like obesity and smoking, an ageing population, and the spread of infectious diseases are leading to soaring costs for the NHS. We will turn the Department of Health into a Department for Public Health so that the promotion of good health and prevention of illness get the attention they need. We will provide separate public health funding to local communities, which will be accountable for – and paid according to – how successful they are in improving their residents' health. In addition, we will:

- introduce a health premium – weighting public health funding towards the poorest areas with the worst health outcomes;
- enable welfare-to-work providers and employers to purchase services from Mental Health Trusts; and,
- increase access to effective 'talking' therapies.

Where possible we want to devolve control over health budgets to the lowest possible level, so people have more control over their health needs. For people with a chronic illness or a long-term condition, we will provide access to a single budget that combines their health and social care funding, which they can tailor to their own needs.

Promote sport and play

We will create a new generation of local parks by introducing neighbourhood budgets from development planning gains, and giving communities greater control over the planning system. This will enable communities to create new parks on derelict land through re-zoning, and give communities a direct source of funding that can be used to pay for playground equipment and park maintenance.

Part of the community sports budget of the National Lottery will be used to deliver an Olympic legacy, including the vigorous promotion of competitive sports through a national Olympic-style school competition.

Fight back against crime

Crack down on problem drinking and anti-social behaviour

Under Labour's lax licensing regime, drink-fuelled violence and disorder are a blight on many communities. We will overhaul the Licensing Act to give local authorities and the police much stronger powers to remove licences from, or refuse to grant licences to, any premises that are causing problems. In addition, we will:

- allow councils and the police to shut down permanently any shop or bar found persistently selling alcohol to children;
- double the maximum fine for under-age alcohol sales to £20,000;
- raise taxes on those drinks linked to anti-social drinking, while abolishing Labour's new 'cider tax' on ordinary drinkers;
- ban off-licences and supermarkets from selling alcohol below cost price; and,
- permit local councils to charge more for late night licences to pay for additional policing.

We recognise the need for criminal sanctions like ASBOs and fixed penalty notices, but they are blunt instruments that often fail their purpose of deterring people from committing more crime. We will introduce a series of early intervention measures, including grounding orders, to allow the police to use instant sanctions to deal with anti-social behaviour without criminalising young people unnecessarily.

Reduce knife crime

Today, almost four out of every five people found guilty of a knife crime escape jail. We have to send a serious, unambiguous message that carrying a knife is totally unacceptable, so we will make it clear that anyone convicted of a knife crime can expect to face a prison sentence. We will introduce mobile knife scanners on streets and public transport, and extend the length of custodial sentences that

can be awarded in a Magistrates' Court from six to twelve months.

More accountable local policing

Policing relies on consent. People want to know that the police are listening to them, and the police want to be able to focus on community priorities, not ticking boxes. We will replace the existing, invisible and unaccountable police authorities and make the police accountable to a directly-elected individual who will set policing priorities for local communities. They will be responsible for setting the budget and the strategy for local police forces, with the police retaining their operational independence.

Giving people democratic control over policing priorities is a huge step forward in the empowerment of local communities, and we will go further by giving people the information they need to challenge their neighbourhood police teams to cut crime. We will oblige the police to publish detailed local crime data statistics every month, in an open and standardised format.

A more liberal, tolerant and open society

Our progressive mission to build a more dynamic, enterprising and participatory society will fail unless everybody has the chance to play their part. This is why tackling discrimination and promoting diversity have become so important to the Conservative Party today.

We have led by changing our own party – for example, by fielding more candidates from ethnic minority groups and more women candidates than ever before. But in government we want to help change society, and have a range of policies to make Britain a country where opportunity is more equal.

There is still evidence of a large gender pay gap and discriminatory practices by some employers. We will force equal pay audits on any company found to be discriminating on the basis of gender.

We will tackle age discrimination by giving people more choice over when to retire and how to use their retirement incomes: we are looking at how to abolish the default retirement age and will abolish the effective obligation to purchase an annuity by the age of 75.

We support legislation to make homophobic incitement a crime and will change the law so that any past convictions for consensual homosexual sexual activities, which have since become lawful, will be treated as spent, and will not be disclosed on a criminal record check when applying for a job. We are strong supporters of civil partnerships, and will back them in the same way that we recognise marriage, including in our tax reforms.

We will change government guidance to schools on behaviour and exclusions to make it clear that bullying aggravated by prejudice should result in tougher punishments than other forms of persistently disruptive behaviour. This would include homophobic bullying, as well as bullying on the basis of gender, race or disability. And we believe that all forms of violent bullying should continue to lead to some form of exclusion.

There are still gaps in school attainment and education and work participation between ethnic groups, and our plans to have more specialised community-led school and employment programmes will be far more effective at helping close these gaps than Labour's state-run schemes. And we plan to create a national mentoring programme for BME job seekers who want to start a business: it will provide would-be entrepreneurs with the targeted support, advice – and, crucially, role models – they need to access finance and work for themselves.

We will help make public life more representative of people with disabilities by introducing a £1 million fund to help people with disabilities who want to become MPs, councillors or other elected officials with the extra costs they face in running for office. We will also introduce simpler assessment for social care and other services for parents of disabled children, and give them more power and control over the services they receive through the greater use of personal budgets and direct payments.

Support for the arts

Before 1997, the Conservatives took two big steps forward for the arts. The creation of the Department of National Heritage (now the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) put the arts at the top table for the first time. The establishment of the National Lottery put in place a funding stream that has led to the revival of many arts organisations, and the establishment of numerous others across the country.

A Conservative government will build on these achievements. Under Labour, the arts have not been given the priority they deserve. Lottery funding has been raided, first to pay for political projects and then for the Olympics. There have been four Culture Secretaries in as many years in the last Parliament. The priorities of the arts funding bodies have become distorted because the Government has used them for political ends.

We can't go on like this. The arts need coherent and sustained support in order to consolidate and build on their achievements.

Securing funding for the arts

We will restore the National Lottery to its four core aims: the arts, heritage, sport and charities. Since 1998, the current Government has diverted almost £3.5 billion away from the original good causes – including the arts – and into its own projects. This means £240 million less is going into the arts from the Lottery each year than in 1997. With the Conservatives, the Lottery will be independent of politicians, and we will increase the share of Lottery funding received by the arts.

A Conservative government will make use of public funding to catalyse philanthropy and private sector investment by requiring a wider use of 'matched grants' by the Arts Council. We will increase the frequency of funding awards where the grant is conditional on the arts body raising some money themselves.

We will also introduce a fourth pillar to arts funding by enabling our leading museums and performing venues to build up endowments. Setting up endowments is the next big frontier for arts organisations to cross so, in return for long-term funding agreements, arts organisations will be encouraged to raise money for endowments. We will also look to encourage endowments through the use of matched funding from the Arts Council. One-off endowment grants will also be available on a competitive basis from the Lottery every year.

Promoting excellence in the arts

A Conservative government will maintain free access to the National Museums and Galleries. In addition, we will give our national museums greater independence so that they are free to spend the money they raise as they see fit. We will introduce a Museums and Heritage Bill that will establish a new administrative status for non-departmental public bodies within the cultural and heritage sectors. This will recognise their role as public organisations with responsibility to steward the nation's assets. But it will also allow them the independence to be truly effective and entrepreneurial fundraising bodies. They must have both the ability and responsibility to raise money both for capital projects and also for endowments to give them funding security over the long term.

2. Vote blue, go green

We are all agreed that climate change is one of the greatest and most daunting challenges of our age. We have a moral imperative to act – and act now.

First we need to understand that international co-operation is crucial. So we will work relentlessly to establish an effective, binding and fair deal to cut carbon emissions that includes all major economies. That means the UK must push for the EU emissions target to be raised to at least a 30 per cent reduction in emissions by 2020 if an ambitious global deal is struck.

We must take decisive action here at home too. That is why Conservatives were the first party to back the Big Ask campaign for a Climate Change Bill with binding targets for reductions in carbon emissions. And in government we would make sure we deliver on that commitment by imposing tough regulation where necessary. For example, our Emissions Performance Standard will impose new standards on energy production.

But our vision for a greener future is not just about international co-operation and government action. Our big idea for our country is the Big Society – a society where we all come together and work together to solve our problems. We passionately believe that the most powerful solutions to the problem of climate change will come from people: businesses, families, consumers. Through the products you create and the choices you make, you will be the driving force behind the sustainable consumption we all want to see.

So our big mission in government will be to make it easier or more attractive for people to do the right thing, to bring their energy consumption down and drive the new green economy.

Our message is one of optimism as well as urgency. Yes, our planet is under threat. But on our side we have got millions of people and thousands of businesses across Britain who really want to make the low carbon economy a reality – and, if we win that election, a Conservative government that is determined to unlock that opportunity for everyone. Together we can reduce our emissions and help tackle climate change.

Help people to go green

Climate change is a global phenomenon, and that means the world must work together to reduce harmful emissions. A Conservative government will work towards an ambitious

global deal that will limit emissions and make available substantial financial resources for adaptation and mitigation.

As part of our commitment to move towards a low carbon future, we can confirm our aim of reducing carbon emissions by 80 per cent by 2050. In government, we will lead from the front by delivering a 10 per cent cut in central government emissions within 12 months and by working with local authorities and others to deliver emissions reductions. 50 Conservative-led councils, covering a population of over 11 million people, have now committed to cut their carbon dioxide emissions by 10 per cent in 12 months. This means that more Conservative-led councils have committed to taking this action than either Lib Dem- or Labour-led councils – proving that only the Conservatives can be trusted to deliver on the environment.[3]

Labour's approach of simply pulling bureaucratic levers from above and imposing a centralised view of the world through rules, laws and punitive stealth taxation, risks putting people off taking the action we need to go green. Conservatives believe in empowering people to make green choices – going with the grain of human nature, creating new incentives and market signals which reward people for doing the right thing. So we will:

- create a 'Green Deal', giving every home up to £6,500 worth of energy improvement measures – with more for hard-to-treat homes – paid for out of savings made on fuel bills over 25 years;
- accelerate the roll-out of smart meters, so that families can reduce their energy consumption by having clearer information about the amount of energy they are using;
- increase consumers' control over their energy costs by ensuring that every energy bill provides information on how to move to the cheapest tariff offered by their supplier and how their energy usage compares to similar households; and,
- improve the energy efficiency of everyday appliances by drawing on the experience of the 'top runner' scheme from Japan.

Households need new incentives to go green, so we will reward people who do the right thing by encouraging councils to pay people to recycle, while scrapping Labour's plans for new bin taxes on families. To help this happen, we will put a floor under the standard rate of landfill tax until 2020 to encourage alternative forms of waste disposal.

We will allow communities to benefit from wind power. We believe in allowing communities to be active participants in, as well as beneficiaries of, onshore wind development. So we will allow communities that choose to host wind farms to keep the additional business rates they generate for six years.

Create a low carbon economy

Britain is uniquely well placed to be the world's first low carbon economy. We already have the natural resources to generate wind and wave power, a skilled workforce trained in the energy industry, a high-tech manufacturing sector and a green financial centre in the City of London. But Labour's approach to supporting green technology has failed, and as a result the UK is lagging far behind other countries in the trillion pound market for green goods and services. Official government figures show that the UK has less than a 5 per cent share of this global market – less than France, Germany, USA or Japan. [4] A Conservative government's response to climate change will create economic and business opportunities for our country.

We need to cut our carbon emissions to tackle the challenge of climate change. But the low carbon economy also provides exciting opportunities for British businesses. We will encourage private sector investment to put Britain at the forefront of the green technology revolution, creating jobs and new businesses across the country.

This wave of low carbon innovation that we want to unleash requires investment, so we will create Britain's first Green Investment Bank – which will draw together money currently divided across existing government initiatives, leveraging private sector capital to finance new green technology start-ups. We will create green Individual Savings Accounts to help provide the financial backing we need to create a low carbon economy.

A credible and sustainable price for carbon is vital if we are to see adequate and timely investment in new electricity generation. Whatever the carbon content of electricity generated, operators considering new investments in projects with a life of several decades need to know where they stand. We will reform the Climate Change Levy to provide a floor price for carbon in the electricity sector, delivering the right climate for investment in low carbon energy production.

We will increase the proportion of tax revenues accounted for by environmental taxes, ensuring that any additional revenues from new green taxes that are principally designed as an environmental measure to change behaviour are used to reduce the burden of taxation elsewhere.

Make our energy supplies greener

The way our energy is produced and transmitted is stuck in the last century and is not up to the challenge of climate change. After thirteen years of a Labour government,

the UK now gets more of its energy from fossil fuels than it did in 1997[5] and has the worst record of any major EU nation when it comes to renewable energy.[6] Conservative plans are for an environmental and energy revolution, which would make Britain a world leader in moves towards creating a low carbon economy.

A Conservative government will transform this unresponsive network and create an 'electricity internet' – a highly interactive network, based on a new smart grid that will interact with smart meters in people's homes, to manage supply and demand. This will allow a huge increase in renewable power, and far greater choice for consumers.

To limit harmful emissions from UK power stations, we will take steps to encourage new low carbon energy production, including:

- introducing an Emissions Performance Standard, setting a limit on the emissions from UK power stations. This will send a clear and long-term investment signal that new, unabated coal plants have no future in the UK market;
- accelerating the planned programme of carbon capture and storage (CCS) demonstration projects. We will bring the current CCS competition to a rapid conclusion and expand the demonstration programme to at least four facilities;
- clearing the way for new nuclear power stations – provided they receive no public subsidy;
- delivering an offshore electricity grid in order to support the development of a new generation of offshore wind power, and establish at least two Marine Energy Parks; and,
- giving local authorities the power to establish new district heating networks which use biogas and other low carbon fuels.

Create a green transport system

Stop new runways at main London airports

Over 13 years Labour have failed to deliver on their promise of a fundamental shift from cars to public transport. And Labour's plans for a third runway at Heathrow are proof that they cannot be trusted to safeguard our environment. Conservatives want to make it easier for people to make greener transport choices. We will provide a fresh approach to public transport and give people real alternatives to their cars.

Because travel abroad is so important for our economy and for family holidays, we need to improve our airports and reduce the environmental impact of flying. Our goal is to make Heathrow airport better, not bigger.

We will stop the third runway and instead link Heathrow directly to our high speed rail network, providing an alternative to thousands of flights. In addition, we will:

- block plans for second runways at Stansted and Gatwick; and,
- reform Air Passenger Duty to encourage a switch to fuller and cleaner planes.

Create a new high speed rail network and improve rail travel

A Conservative government will begin work immediately to create a high speed rail line connecting London and Heathrow with Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds. This is the first step towards achieving our vision of creating a national high speed rail network to join up major cities across England, Scotland and Wales. Stage two will deliver two new lines bringing the North East, Scotland and Wales into the high speed rail network.

To improve life for commuters and encourage people to switch to lower carbon public transport, we will reform our railways to provide a better focus on tackling problems that matter most to passengers, such as overcrowding. We will grant longer, more flexible rail franchises to incentivise private sector investment in improvements like longer trains and better stations.

We support Crossrail and the electrification of the Great Western line to South Wales. We will turn the rail regulator into a powerful passenger champion and reform Network Rail to make it more accountable to its customers. And we will introduce a moratorium on building on disused rail lines still in public ownership, so they are available to be re-opened.

Support greener forms of transport

Britain has the chance to lead the world in making our transport system greener. So we will introduce incentives for electricity network operators to establish a new national car recharging network, making it much easier for drivers to move to electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles. We will support sustainable travel initiatives that work best for local communities by:

- giving the concerns of cyclists much greater priority;
- encouraging partnerships between bus operators and local authorities; and,
- helping people cut down on work-related travel.

Protect and improve green spaces

Under Labour our natural environment has been degraded. Too many animals remain at risk of extinction, and climate change will put even more pressure on endangered species and precious habitats. A Conservative government will take action to protect and enhance our natural environment from the pressures of climate change, over-exploitation of resources and development. We will:

- promote new green spaces and wildlife corridors to help animals adapt and thrive in the face of climate change;
- maintain national Green Belt protection, Areas of Outstanding Nature Beauty, National Parks, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and other environmental designations which protect the character of our country's landscape, stop unsustainable urban sprawl and preserve wildlife;
- work to reduce litter, which spoils too much of our countryside and urban environment; and,
- press for financial support from within a reformed EU budget to be given to developing countries to halt deforestation.

Since 1997, the area of new woodland created in England each year has more than halved. In addition to ongoing woodland creation, we will launch a national tree planting campaign, planting over one million new trees in the next Parliament. A Conservative government will invite local communities to plant a tree for every child born in England each year, from 2013 onwards. We will provide funding for communities and families to plant new trees for future generations by earmarking proceeds from the sale of approximately 1.5 per cent of the public woodlands estate to pay for the England-wide tree planting scheme.

3. Real people power

Over the last forty years, governments of all colours have been guilty of weakening local government. But what was a gradual centralisation has accelerated dramatically under Labour. Bureaucratic control has replaced democratic accountability. The wishes of local people are second-guessed by bureaucrats; the activities of councils are micro-managed by unelected quangos.

This hoarding of power by distant politicians and unaccountable officials in Whitehall has damaged society by eroding trust. We believe that the more responsibility you give people, the more responsibly they behave. That is why we are so determined to give people much more power and control over their lives. Citizens themselves should have a direct say over how they are governed – but not through bureaucratic consultations or phoney citizens juries, which never change anything.

We need a totally different approach to governing, one that involves people in making the decisions that affect them. This is what we call collaborative democracy – people taking the kind of powers that until now have been exercised only by governments. So we want to pass power down to people – to individuals where we can. But it is not always possible to give power to individuals, and in those cases we need to push power down to the most appropriate local level: neighbourhood, community and local government. This is how we will build the Big Society – from the bottom up.

Hand power from Parliament to people

More control over Parliament

The political crisis was triggered by the scandal of MPs' expenses. We were the Party that insisted that MPs' expenses were published online, and we have supported the independent proposals to clean up the House of Commons. We proposed legislation so that anyone wanting to be a member of either the House of Commons or the House of Lords will need to be treated as a full UK taxpayer. But much, much more is needed to clean up our politics and restore public trust.

Of the last five Prime Ministers of the UK, only two were first elected to that position by the people. A Conservative government will legislate to ensure that Britain is never again governed for years by a Prime Minister with no popular mandate. We will change the law so that Parliament will be automatically dissolved within six months of a change of Prime

Minister (other than at a General Election). This means that a new Prime Minister will have to submit his or her programme to the electorate shortly after taking office, and to secure his or her own popular mandate to govern.

At the moment, there is no way that local constituents can remove an MP found guilty of serious wrongdoing until there is a general election. That is why a Conservative government will introduce a power of 'recall' to allow electors to kick out MPs, a power that will be triggered by proven serious wrongdoing. And we will introduce a Parliamentary Privilege Act to make clear that privilege cannot be abused by MPs to evade justice.

The public should be more involved in choosing Parliamentary candidates too. The Conservative Party was the first British political party to use an all-postal primary to select a candidate, resulting in nearly 17,000 people being involved in a process which selected Sarah Wollaston as our candidate for Totnes. To make sure all parties can engage the public in this important part of the democratic process, we will fund 200 all-postal primaries over the next Parliament. These funds will be allocated to all political parties with seats in Parliament that they take up, in proportion to their share of the total vote in the last General Election. The cost of these primaries will be met from cuts to the budget of the Electoral Commission.

More control over legislation

People have been shut out of Westminster politics for too long. Having a single vote every four or five years is not good enough – we need to give people real control over how they are governed. So, with a Conservative government, any petition that secures 100,000 signatures will be eligible for formal debate in Parliament. The petition with the most signatures will enable members of the public to table a Bill eligible to be voted on in Parliament.

We will introduce a new Public Reading Stage for Bills to give the public an opportunity to comment on proposed legislation online. As part of that, we will create a Public Reading Day – a specific day in the process of a Bill when the members of the relevant Public Bill Committee consider the comments made by citizens during the Public Reading Stage of the Bill.

Hand power to neighbourhoods

Establish neighbourhood groups

Our reform agenda is designed to empower communities to come together to address local issues. For example, we will enable parents to start new schools, empower communities to take over local amenities such as parks and libraries that are under threat, give neighbourhoods greater control of the planning system, and enable residents to hold the police to account in neighbourhood beat meetings.

These policies will give new powers and rights to neighbourhood groups: the 'little platoons' of civil society – and the institutional building blocks of the Big Society.

Our ambition is for every adult in the country to be a member of an active neighbourhood group. We will stimulate the creation and development of neighbourhood groups, which can take action to improve their local area. We will use Cabinet Office budgets to fund the training of independent community organisers to help people establish and run neighbourhood groups, and provide neighbourhood grants to the UK's poorest areas to ensure they play a leading role in the rebuilding of civic society. And we will launch an annual Big Society Day to celebrate the work of neighbourhood groups and encourage more people to take part in social action.

Create neighbourhood budgets

We will abolish the entire bureaucratic and undemocratic tier of regional planning, including the Regional Spatial Strategies and building targets. Developers will have to pay a tariff to the local authority to compensate the community for any loss of amenity and the costs of additional infrastructure. The tariff will replace the payments and levies on development that have grown up under Labour. A portion of this tariff will be kept by the neighbourhoods in which a given development takes place, providing clear incentives for communities which go for growth. This will give neighbourhoods real budgets, which they will be able to decide how to spend: for example, on refurbishing playgrounds, creating a park or building a drop-in centre for older people. As an illustrative example, for a typical neighbourhood this funding could amount to £40,000 a year.

Hand power to communities

Put communities in charge of planning

A good planning system is vital for a strong economy, for an attractive and sustainable environment, and for a successful democracy. A Conservative government will introduce a new 'open source' planning system. This will mean that people in each neighbourhood will

be able to specify what kind of development they want to see in their area. These neighbourhood plans will be consolidated into a local plan.

Significant local projects, like new housing estates, will have to be designed through a collaborative process that has involved the neighbourhood. Immediate neighbours will have a new role – with a faster approvals process for planning applications where neighbours raise no objections.

At the national level, for all forms of development, we will publish and present to Parliament for debate a simple and consolidated national planning framework, which will set out national economic and environmental priorities. To give communities greater control over planning, we will:

- abolish the power of planning inspectors to rewrite local plans;
- amend the 'Use Classes Order' so that people can use buildings for any purpose allowed in the local plan;
- limit appeals against local planning decisions to cases that involve abuse of process or failure to apply the local plan;
- encourage county councils and unitary authorities to compile infrastructure plans;
- give local planning authorities and other public authorities a duty to co-operate with one another; and,
- allow neighbourhoods to stop the practice of 'garden grabbing'.

Help communities meet their own housing needs

Communities should benefit when they choose to develop sustainably, so we will match pound-for-pound the council tax receipts that local authorities receive from new homes to encourage sensitive local development. We will create new local housing trusts to allow communities to grant planning permission for new housing within villages and towns – so that the benefits of development remain within the local area.

Enable communities to protect vital local services

Nothing underlines the powerlessness that many communities feel more than the loss of essential services, like post offices and pubs, because of decisions made by distant bureaucrats. Our new 'community right to buy' scheme will give local people the power to protect any community assets that are threatened with closure. In addition, we will:

- give people a 'right to bid' to run any community service instead of the state; and,
- reform the governance arrangements in football to enable co-operative ownership models to be established by supporters.

Hand power to local councils

Give more power to local government

We will give democratically accountable local government much greater power to improve their citizens' lives by giving local councils a 'general power of competence', so that they have explicit authority to do what is necessary to improve their communities. In addition, we will:

- end ring-fencing so that funding can be spent on local priorities;
- scrap the hundreds of process targets Labour have imposed on councils;
- end the bureaucratic inspection regime that stops councils focusing on residents' main concerns;
- scrap Labour's uncompleted plans to impose unwieldy and expensive unitary councils and to force the regionalisation of the fire service;
- end the 'predetermination rules' that prevent councillors speaking up about issues that they have campaigned on; and,
- encourage the greater use of ward budgets for councillors.

Create city mayors

We have seen that a single municipal leader can inject dynamism and ambition into their communities. So, initially, we will give the citizens in each of England's twelve largest cities the chance of having an elected mayor. Big decisions should be made by those who are democratically accountable, not by remote and costly quangos. We will abolish the Government Office for London as part of our plan to devolve more power downwards to the London Boroughs and the Mayor of London.

Make local politics more accountable

We want to give individuals more direct control over how they are governed. So, mirroring our reforms at the national level, we will give residents the power to instigate local referendums on any local issue if 5 per cent of the local population sign up, and they will also be able to veto any proposed high council tax increases.

Decentralising control must go hand in hand with creating much greater transparency in local government. Power without information is not enough. We will implement fully the Sustainable Communities Act to give people greater information on, and control over, what is being spent by each government agency in their area. We will make local councils publish every spending item over £500, as well as the

salaries and expenses of their senior officials.

Our plans to decentralise power will only work properly if there is a strong, independent and vibrant local media to hold local authorities to account. We will sweep away the rules that stop local newspapers owning other local media platforms and create a new network of local television stations. And we will tighten the rules on taxpayer-funded publicity spending by town halls.

4. Defend civil liberties

Labour have shown complete contempt for our civil liberties. They may call themselves progressive. But under Labour, there are now a million innocent people on the biggest DNA database in the world – bigger than that of any dictatorship. Under Labour, tens of thousands of officials have the power to barge past your front door with hundreds of new powers. Under Labour, councils and quangos carry out surveillance operations on parents taking their children to school. Under Labour, citizens are being forced to surrender their fingerprints, eye scans and personal information to a plastic ID card.

It does not have to be like this. If you are a progressive, if you care about our liberties, if you want to free people from the clutches of an over-mighty state, we say join us. We fought 42-day detention – and brought about another humiliating Brown u-turn as his plans crashed to defeat. We are going to remove the details of innocent people from the DNA database and will amend the surveillance laws which allow councils to spy on their residents. We will strengthen our fundamental legal rights – from trial by jury to extradition law, so we do not pack off vulnerable British citizens to stand trial in America for computer-hacking. And, we will scrap that most domineering, expensive and intrusive scheme of all – ID cards.

But we will go much, much further. As real progressives, we understand protecting the individual from the state is not enough. We must combine that with a determination to give people more power and control over their lives. So whether it is policing, energy, local government, housing or planning, we plan the most radical redistribution of power from the political elite to the man and woman on the street.

Roll back the intrusive state

Reduce the state's powers of entry

There are now 1,242 state powers of entry in force. These go back as far as 1737, yet a massive 587 of them have been created by Labour since May 1997.[7]

When he became Prime Minister, Gordon Brown pledged to introduce a new liberty test to curtail powers of entry and 'do more to safeguard privacy in the home.'[8] He commissioned Lord West to undertake a review of entry powers. A final report by Lord West was supposed to be published by spring 2009,[9] but has been continually delayed and kicked into the long grass. It is clear that

Gordon Brown is not committed to rolling back the intrusive state.

A Conservative government will cut back the intrusive powers of entry into homes. Public bodies (other than the police and emergency services) will require a magistrates' warrant, and approval for such a warrant will be restricted to tackling serious criminal offences or protecting public safety. Labour plans to give bailiffs powers of forced entry into homes to collect civil debts will be revoked.

Stop unwarranted surveillance

Labour's Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 ('RIPA') was passed to help tackle terror and serious crimes, although the small print allows the use of surveillance when it is 'necessary and proportionate to prevent or detect a criminal offence'. Since 2006, there have been an average of 10,641 authorised cases of 'directed surveillance' every year by public authorities other than law enforcement bodies; there are 289 uses a year of 'covert human intelligence sources' (informers) by local authorities, and 1,651 authorisations for 'acquisition of communications data' by local authorities.[10] This is equivalent to 34 cases of spying every day.

The over-use of RIPA by local authorities, without judicial checks, further blurs the line between local authorities and police forces, and raises questions over the fairness of summary justice. The Labour Government has announced small changes to the manner in which RIPA operates,[11] but these are cosmetic changes to guidance which do not go far enough. We will curtail these surveillance powers that allow councils to spy on people making trivial mistakes or minor breaches of the rules.

Protect our basic freedoms

Create a new Bill of Rights

We must get the balance right between security and liberty. Illiberal counter-terrorism laws can actually alienate people and push them towards extremism. Conservatives defeated Labour's attempt to extend pre-charge detention to 42 days. Labour had no evidence to support their calls. To protect our freedoms from state encroachment and encourage greater social responsibility, we will replace the Human Rights Act with a UK Bill of Rights.

The right to trial by jury is one of our oldest civil liberties. Yet Labour have repeatedly attempted to undermine jury trial, legislating to oust juries in cases of fraud, inquests, and where there is a possibility of jury-tampering.

We will repeal the provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 which allow fraud trials to be held without a jury. And we will amend the Act to ensure there is evidence that attempts at juror or witness intimidation have been made before a judge can order a trial without a jury.

Reform extradition laws

The Extradition Act 2003 introduced new procedures to govern extradition to and from the UK. These procedures are unfair and lack reciprocity. Britain now allows extradition to a range of countries without that country having to produce proper evidence that the person in question has committed a crime. Changes under the Act have also meant that British citizens can be extradited to other parts of Europe for a range of ill-defined offences that may not be a crime at all here and in many European countries.

Conservatives will review the operation of the Extradition Act – and the US/UK extradition treaty – to make sure that arrangements are even-handed and work both ways. Our system should also take health issues into account before considering deportation.

Protect freedom of speech

In recent years, London has become the forum of choice for litigants wanting to sue for defamation. There is widespread concern that the current laws on libel, coupled with excessive legal costs, have led to legitimate concerns about the impact on freedom of expression. It is important that people should have the right to take legal action if they are libelled, and the onus should be on those who make defamatory claims to justify those claims. However, libel law should not be able to be used to prevent responsible journalists, scientists or academics from raising matters of concern that are in the public interest. We will review and reform libel laws to protect freedom of speech, reduce costs and discourage libel tourism.

Stop Labour's database state

Conservatives will end Labour's surveillance state. There should be fewer giant central government databases. Wherever possible, personal data should be controlled by individual citizens themselves. Fewer personal details should be held, they should be accurately recorded and they should be held only by specific authorities – on a need-to-know basis, and for limited periods of time. There should be greater Parliamentary scrutiny of any new data-sharing powers; a Privacy Impact Assessment should be required for any new proposal that involves data collection or sharing; and, there should be stronger duties on government to keep the private information that it gathers safe.

Scrap ID cards and Contactpoint

Labour's ID card scheme will be intrusive, ineffective and enormously expensive. Despite the massive cost, ID cards will do nothing to improve our safety. They are not the answer to

the threats of terrorism, illegal immigration, human trafficking or identity theft.

Labour intends to store almost 50 pieces of personal information on the National Identity Register. Every adult citizen with an ID card will be required to be fingerprinted, and all ten fingerprints will be stored on the National Identity Register.[12] A Conservative government will scrap the ID cards and the National Identity Register.

Labour Ministers have admitted that 390,000 bureaucrats and other officials will have access to ContactPoint, the children's database containing details of 11 million children.[13] We will scrap ContactPoint on the grounds that it will not be secure and is unnecessary. We are in favour of a smaller, more tightly controlled database for the most vulnerable children.

Reform the DNA database

The indefinite retention of innocent people's DNA is unacceptable, yet DNA data provides a useful tool for solving crimes. We will legislate to make sure that our DNA database is used primarily to store information about those who are guilty of committing crimes, rather than those who are innocent. We will collect the DNA of all existing prisoners, those under state supervision who have been convicted of an offence, and anyone convicted of a serious, recordable offence. We pushed the Government to end the permanent retention of innocent people's DNA , and we will change the guidance to give people on the database who have been wrongly accused of a minor crime an automatic right to have their DNA withdrawn.

Improve the vetting of parents and volunteers

The latest encroachment of the surveillance state is Labour's so-called Vetting and Barring Scheme. Even the NSPCC has warned: 'The warning signs are now out there that this scheme will stop people doing things that are perfectly safe and normal: things that they shouldn't be prevented from doing.'[14]

We believe that people working in positions of trust with children or vulnerable adults should go through a proper criminal record check. But Labour's new system goes too far. Conservatives will review the criminal records and vetting and barring regime and scale it back to common sense levels.

1. OECD Health Data 2009
2. British Medical Journal, 30 April 2005
3. Information provided by the 10:10 Campaign
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6. Hansard, 8 June 2009, Col. 727WA
7. Analysis of Home Office figures published by Lord West's Review of Powers of Entry, 2008, and subsequent powers passed
8. Speech at the University of Westminster, 25 October 2007
9. Hansard, 20 November 2008, col. 729WA
10. Lords Hansard, 4 November 2009, Col. 56WA
11. Home Office, RIPA: Consolidating Orders and Codes of Practice, November 2009
12. Hansard, 25 January 2010, Col. 648WA
13. The Times, 27 January 2009
14. BBC News Online, 13 September 2009

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